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NEWS RELEASE

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**BOUNDARY COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$9.8 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Boundary County residents and businesses received nearly \$9.8 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 10,200 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Boundary County ranks number 16 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$960 for every man, woman and child residing in Boundary County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in 2004 statewide in Idaho communities. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Boundary County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

“This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing,” adds Kurtz. “By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn’t just me pounding my chest. That’s what community leaders tell us.”

Boundary County Commissioner Walt Kirby says, “(Department) programs do a lot for our county. In just Medicaid alone, there’s a huge influx of money into the county and a lot of it gets spent here. There’s a significant payroll at the hospital. Each and every dime that comes this way is a benefit for the county. The Food Stamp and WIC money gets spent locally. The grocery stores are major employers in the county. The Department (of Health & Welfare) is a big piece of business here.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$8.3 million on health care for residents of the county — a \$1.6 million increase over 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Boundary Pharmacy in Bonners Ferry. “It’s huge for us. A quarter of our business is Medicaid,” says store owner Jeff Foster. “It benefits our county because we have nine employees and it helps pay for them. If I didn’t have Medicaid, I would have to lay off half of them and our clients wouldn’t have access to medicine. We help support kids in our schools and community. Without the Medicaid money, I don’t know that we could do things like that.”

The story is much the same at Boundary Community Hospital. The hospital received Medicaid payments of \$254,000 for inpatient and outpatient care of Medicaid clients in 2004. The hospital also received an additional payment of \$154,000 in Federal Upper Payment Limits. The payment helps compensate the hospital for low Medicaid reimbursement and can be used for any purpose so it has the potential of benefiting anyone who uses the hospital. “We use it to fund operations,” says Hospital Administrator Craig Johnson. “It helps us pay the bills. Sometimes our cash flow is a real challenge. (FUPL) really helps small hospitals. It’s a god send.”

Boundary County residents received \$658,500 in Food Stamps in 2004 to help feed their families, spending \$419,000 with local grocers. Safeway Food & Drug in Bonners Ferry redeemed \$64,700.

Safeway’s Director of Public/Government Affairs is Cherie Meyers in Bellevue, Washington. She says the money is important, and “every dollar counts,” helping to keep the 25-30 workers at the Bonners Ferry store employed. “Our business is based on sales,” she says. “If sales drop, that affects everything we do.”

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. These dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Michelle Britton at 755-3772 for more information.)

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investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**